

OPEN LETTERS.

ANOTHER QUESTION OF NOMENCLATURE.

THE receipt of Mr. G. B. Sudworth's *Check-List of the Forest Trees of the United States* (U. S. Dept. Agriculture), stirs me up to make a protest against a nomenclatural heresy which seems to find favor in certain quarters. It is this: *that a varietal name must be changed if it occurs elsewhere in the genus, even as the name of another species, or of a variety of another species.* This doctrine does not seem to me to be justified by the codes, nor is it conducive to the stability of varietal names. I have for many years had a good deal to do with the varietal nomenclature of animals, particularly mollusca, and have always considered it commendable to give the same name (*e. g., minor, alba, elongata, hirsuta, etc.*) to similar variations of different species. This plan is widely accepted among zoologists, and is found advantageous in every way. The first time I noticed any general application of the contrary plan was when I received Bull. 9 of the *Minnesota Botanical Studies*. In this work (1894) Mr. E. P. Sheldon proposes ten varietal names in *Astragalus*, all of which I consider quite needless. Mr. Sudworth, in his *Nomenclature of the Arborescent Flora of the United States* (1897), and again in the above-mentioned *Check-List*, has followed the same doctrine, and has made sixty-six substitutions of new names for old, which I think should not be accepted. He has also made a number of other substitutions which rest on other grounds, and are apparently valid.

It is particularly important to decide at this time what we are going to do about the doctrine here discussed, because Mr. Sudworth has very excellently prepared a revised nomenclature of the cultivated varieties of our native trees, and unless some protest is made, it will doubtless become current as it stands. The desirability of a correct nomenclature for cultivated plants need not be urged, nor need it be pointed out that it must be for botanists to decide, eventually, what system shall be adopted. The system introduced by Mr. Sudworth, if supported, will logically compel us to make a revision of varietal nomenclature in many other groups, productive of much inconvenience, and, as I believe, of no good.

I append herewith a list of the Sheldonian names in the work cited, which I would reject, giving the corrected nomenclature in the second column. I have also prepared a list of the Sudworthian names, but it is too long to print here.

Other similar instances may be found in the *List of Pteridophyta and Spermatophyta in Northeastern North America* (1894), particularly under *Carex*.

A reasonable rule, which would avoid these changes, would be: *Only identical combinations shall be considered homonyms.*

NAME PROPOSED BY SHELDON.	CORRECT NAME ACCORDING TO PRESENT WRITER.
<i>Astragalus viridis impensus.</i>	<i>A. v. elatus</i> (Wats.).
<i>A. speirocarpus curvicarpus.</i>	<i>A. s. falciformis</i> A. Gray.
<i>A. preussii laxispicatus.</i>	<i>A. p. laxiflorus</i> A. Gray.
<i>A. p. arctus.</i>	<i>A. p. latus</i> Jones.
<i>A. leucopsis curtus.</i>	<i>A. l. brachypus</i> Greene.
<i>A. franciscanus longulus.</i>	<i>A. f. virgatus</i> (A. Gray).
<i>A. megacarpus prodigus.</i>	<i>A. m. parryi</i> A. Gray.
<i>A. sparsiflorus majusculus.</i>	<i>A. s. major</i> A. Gray.
<i>A. glabriusculus spatiosus.</i>	<i>A. g. major</i> A. Gray.
<i>A. atratus arctus.</i>	<i>A. a. stenophyllus</i> Jones.

It will be noted that Mr. Sheldon himself gives the same varietal name to two species. This may be an oversight, or it may be that he considers a varietal name invalid only when used (if not under the same species) in a specific sense elsewhere in the genus. At the same time, he changes a varietal name when the alleged homonym is a pure synonym, so long as it is a binomial.

A curious case is that of *A. crotalariae* var. *virgatus* Gray. It seems that both names are preoccupied in a specific sense, so Sheldon calls the species *A. franciscanus*. According to my views, Gray's varietal term *virgatus* may be retained as *varietal*, though it cannot be applied to the species, because of the earlier *A. virgatus* Pall. Thus we get *A. franciscanus* var. *virgatus*, an instance of a varietal name older than that of the species.—T. D. A. COCKERELL, *Mesilla Park, N. M.*